

WIKILEAKS EXPOSE

Mehsud not behind Benazir's killing: Zardari

IANS, Islamabad

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari had dismissed a suggestion by then US Ambassador Anne Patterson that Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud was responsible for Benazir Bhutto's death, saying he was 'just a pawn' in the process, according to a WikiLeaks expose.

Zardari said he was not very much interested in who the sniper was or exactly how Benazir was killed. This was not as important as finding out who financed the killing, and who were the 'hands behind' it.

When Patterson said that the US believed Mehsud was responsible, Zardari dismissed the suggestion by saying that Mehsud was 'just a pawn'. The News International reported.

Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan after getting a 'clearance' from the US, Zardari told Patterson after Bhutto's assassination, the US embassy cables revealed.

Hillary to keep calling leaders 'for weeks'

AFP, Shannon

Hillary Clinton, who contacted dozens of foreign leaders after the latest WikiLeaks disclosures, will continue to do so for "the next weeks," the US secretary of state told journalists travelling with her yesterday.

"I haven't seen everybody in the world, and apparently there are 252,000 of these things (leaks) out there in cyberspace somewhere," she said, noting with a smile that they had not yet all been published.

"So I think I'll have some outreach to continue doing over the next weeks just to make sure that as things become public, if they raise concerns, I will be prepared to reach out and talk to my counterparts and heads of state and governments," she went on.

"I take on the responsibility because I'm talking to them anyway. I've invested a lot of efforts in building these relationships."

"I really believe that we had to reestablish trust, to reestablish relationships, so I take this very personally."

Speaking of President Barack Obama, Hillary said: "I know he's made recommendations for calls... As he's calling people on other matters, of course (WikiLeaks is) on the list to raise."

The secretary of state was talking to journalists on the plane taking her back to Washington after a trip to Central Asia and Bahrain during which she came under constant pressure over the leaks.

The WikiLeaks website was fighting to stay online after Sweden issued a new arrest warrant for its elusive chief and it battled cyber attacks and government attempts to silence it.

Karzai doubts credibility of US leaked cables

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai said yesterday he doubted that US diplomatic cables leaked by the whistleblowing website WikiLeaks were real.

In one leaked cable, US diplomats said one of Karzai's deputies had transported 52 million dollars out of the country in suitcases, but the president said American officials kept a close watch on claims of corruption.

"If this was true... the American government has been talking to us every day about corruption, every day they come and give us examples, every day they come and bring even a (corruption) case of 5000 dollars," he said at a news conference with visiting Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani.

"How come they did not report to the president about 52 million dollars?"



Demonstrators protest against the World Bank, in the streets of Cancun on Friday in the framework of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP-16). The November 29 to December 10 summit aims to advance efforts towards a post-2012 climate treaty after the near-disaster of the December 2009 Copenhagen summit.

Latest developments

REUTERS, London

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, reported to be in Britain, said he and colleagues were aware of death threats following the website's publication of US diplomatic cables.

Here are some of the latest revelations in US diplomatic cables leaked by WikiLeaks:

AFGHANISTAN
- British troops were "not up" to the task of securing Afghanistan's troubled Helmand province and the local governor pleaded for US reinforcements, American diplomats said.

Senior ministers in Afghan President Hamid Karzai's government feared he was easily swayed by "bizarre stories of plots against him" and agreed to collaborate in a bid to stop him "going astray".

The US envoy to Afghanistan calls President Hamid Karzai a "paranoid," "weak" and "overly self-conscious" leader who may never stop America-bashing.

EGYPT
- President Hosni Mubarak warned US officials Egypt might develop nuclear weapons if Iran obtained them. A US ambassador described Egypt, recipient of billions of dollars in US aid since making peace with Israel in 1979, as a "stubborn and recalcitrant ally" in a February 2009 cable.

Egypt lobbied last year to delay southern Sudan's accession vote for four to six years because it feared the new state could fail and the division could imperil its share of Nile waters.

ITALY
Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi dismissed reports of US worries over his ties with Moscow and repeated he had never profited personally from his contacts.

US diplomats had voiced concern over Berlusconi's ties to Russia's Vladimir Putin and the grip of energy interests on Rome's foreign policy.

LEBANON
US spy planes flew reconnaissance flights over Lebanon from a British air base in Cyprus in a counter-terrorist surveillance operation requested by Lebanese officials.

MEXICO
A top Mexican official said the government was in danger of losing control of parts of the country to powerful drug cartels.

RUSSIA
President Dmitry Medvedev said the leaks showed the "cynicism" of US diplomacy but suggested they would not seriously upset improving ties with Washington.

Cables had suggested Prime Minister Vladimir Putin riles Russia by allowing a vena elite to siphon off cash.

SPAIN
The family of a cameraman killed by US fire during the 2003 invasion of Iraq is considering legal action against Spanish officials after cables revealed their discussions with US diplomats about Spanish legal moves to prosecute the US service-man responsible.

SRI LANKA
- The United States believes there is little prospect Sri Lanka will hold anyone accountable for the bloody end of the war with the Tamil Tigers because war crimes allegations involved top government figures, according to a Jan. 15 cable sent by Patricia Butenis, US ambassador in Colombo.

Another cable, from the US embassy in London, revealed an admission by a British diplomat that former Foreign Secretary David Miliband pressured Sri Lanka's government for a ceasefire to help secure Labour Party votes from Britain's Tamil diaspora.

TURKMENISTAN
- Turkmenistan's leader is described as "not very bright" and "a practised liar" in a cable from the US embassy in the gas-rich Central Asian state.

It said Turkmen President Kurbanguly Berdimukhamedov did not like the United States, Iran or Turkey, but was fond of China. Fastidiously neat, he once insisted all men who worked in his dental clinic had creases in their trousers. [ID:nLDE6B1151]

UNITED NATIONS
- The CIA prepared a list of the kinds of information on UN officials and diplomats that it wanted US envoys in New York and around the world to gather.

VENEZUELA
- Cuban intelligence services directly advised Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in what a US diplomat called the "Axis of Mischief," according to a State Department cable.

WikiLeaks battles to stay online

AFP, London

WikiLeaks was battling to stay online yesterday after Sweden issued a new arrest warrant for its elusive boss Julian Assange, while PayPal axed donations access for the whistleblowing website.

The Times newspaper, citing police sources, reported that Assange -- who is believed to be in Britain -- could be arrested next week. Other media suggested that the 39-year-old Australian could face arrest within 10 days.

Swedish prosecutors have issued a new international arrest warrant for Assange on sex assault allegations that incorporated missing elements which had been requested by British police.

Assange broke cover on Friday to say in an online chat that he had boosted security after receiving death threats amid the storm that was unleashed by his site's decision to publish 250,000 US diplomatic cables.

The WikiLeaks website was meanwhile forced to turn to Switzerland for a new domain name after its original wikileaks.org address was shut down by an American provider, while Paris tried to ban French servers from hosting it.

The Swiss address -- wikileaks.ch -- was up and running again on Saturday after migrating to new servers, the group which owns the name said.

But in a fresh twist, US-based online financial transactions service PayPal revealed overnight that it would stop taking donations for WikiLeaks.

"PayPal has permanently restricted the account used by WikiLeaks due to a violation of the PayPal acceptable use policy, which states that our payment service cannot be used for any activities that encourage, promote, facilitate or instruct others to engage in illegal activity," it said in a statement.

In a message on its Twitter feed, WikiLeaks blamed "US government pressure" for the PayPal ban.

14 killed in Baghdad attacks

AFP, Baghdad

Six Iranian pilgrims were among 14 people killed in a spate of bombings across Baghdad on Saturday morning, security officials said.

Two near-simultaneous blasts, one at a derelict house laced with explosives and the other a car bomb, went off close to a rest house popular with Iranian religious tourists in Kadhimiyah.

Five people, including four Iranians, were killed and 18 were wounded, 11 of them pilgrims, an interior ministry official said, revising his earlier statement that all of the dead and wounded were Iranian.

And in the Shuala neighbourhood, a suicide bomber driving a vehicle packed with explosives rammed into a bus carrying Iranian religious tourists before detonating his payload.

Two Iranians were killed and 28 people were wounded, 19 of whom were Iranian.

'Climate change to cause a million deaths a year'

AFP, Cancun

By 2030, climate change will indirectly cause nearly one million deaths a year and inflict 157 billion dollars in damage, according to estimates presented at UN talks on Friday.

The biggest misery will be heaped on more than 50 of the world's poorest countries, but the United States will pay the highest economic bill, it said.

"In less than 20 years, almost all countries in the world will realise high vulnerability to climate impact as the planet heats up," the report warned.

The study, compiled by a humanitarian research organisation and climate-vulnerable countries, assessed how 184 nations will be affected in four areas: health, weather disasters, the loss of human habitat through desertification and rising seas, and economic stress.

Those facing "acute" exposure are 54 poor or very poor countries, including India. They will suffer disproportionately to others, although they are least to blame for the man-made greenhouse gases that drive climate change, it said.

"Without corrective actions" a press release accompanying the study said, the world is "headed for nearly one million deaths every single year by 2030."

More than half of the 157 billion dollars in economic losses, including in terms of today's economy, will take place in industrialised countries, led by the United States, Japan and Germany.

But the cost to their GDP will proportionately be far lower than for poor countries.

The peer-reviewed report was issued by DARA, a Madrid-based NGO, and by the Climate Vulnerable Forum, a coalition of island nations and other countries that are most exposed to climate change.

Saleemul Huq, a researcher at a London-based thinktank, the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), said the findings spelled out the need to start shoring up defences against climate change now, rather than later.

"We are now entering into a highly vulnerable phase of our planet's existence and humanity's existence," Huq told a press conference.

"No amount of (greenhouse-gas) mitigation will prevent at least another 0.7 degree (Celsius, 1.26 degrees Fahrenheit) of temperature rise over the next two decades," he said.

"In the last century we have already seen a 0.7 degree (1.26 F) rise. So we are headed for 1.4 (2.5 F) almost certainly.

"If emissions carry on their current pathway then we may in the longer term be headed for three or four degrees (5.4-7.2 F), which is practically impossible for everybody to adapt to.

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Philippine leader says media ruining his love life

AP, Manila

The Philippines' bachelor president has appealed for privacy, saying journalists' prying eyes are ruining his love life.

President Benigno Aquino III has been linked to several women since he broke up with girlfriend Shalani Soledad in October. One was his stylist. On Friday, The Philippine Star had a front-page picture of him with a stockbroker said to be his new romantic interest.

The 50-year-old Aquino says he will be spending Christmas without a date because women are scared to go out with him for fear of ending up in the newspaper headlines.

He says it's difficult to woo a woman with the whole nation watching, and joked with reporters that it will "be on your conscience" if another prospective girlfriend stays away.

Is your vision always blur?

- You could have cataracts

Contrary to common belief, cataracts, which are a cloudy growth on your eye, do not have to be 'ripe' for surgery. Have it treated once it starts to interfere with your daily activities.

Symptoms
Most cataracts develop slowly and you may not notice it in the early stages.

Signs include:

- Clouded, blurred or dim vision
- Worsening night vision
- Sensitivity to light and glare
- Seeing halos around light
- Need for bright light when reading and when performing other tasks
- Fading or yellowing of colours
- Double vision in one eye

Treatment
Cataracts cannot be cured with medications.

Lifestyle adjustments such as changing the power of your spectacles, using magnifying glass to read or improving the lighting in your home can be made in the early stages.

Cataract surgery is required when the condition starts to interfere with your daily activities. It is painless, safe and effective. During the surgery, the clouded lens is removed and replaced with a clear lens implant. In modern centres such as Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC), the vast majority of cataract operations are by a technique called phacoemulsification, which uses **ultrasound** energy. The surgery is completed without any need for stitches.

Doctors at the SNEC, where the success rates of cataract surgeries using the phacoemulsification technique is 99.5%, advise that if you are over 65, you should have your eyes checked by an eyecare professional every year. A regular exam is the key to early detection.

For more information on cataracts and the types of lens available for implants and other eye conditions, please go to www.healthxchange.com.sg/eye (Website content in English)

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